Extension Service
West Virginia University.

Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

If Your Basement is Flooded

Before You Enter a Flooded Basement

- Turn off the electricity and gas.
- Check outside cellar walls for possible cave-ins, evidence of structural damage, or other hazards.
- Open doors and windows or use blowers to force fresh air into the basement.

Pumping Out a Flooded Basement

- Do not use an electric pump powered by your own electrical system. Use a gas-powered pump or one connected to an outside line. Fire departments in some communities may help with such services.
- Pump the water from the basement in stages. Remove about one-third of the water each day. Pumping water from the basement too quickly may do more damage than letting the floodwater remain. Water in the basement helps brace the walls against the extra pressure of water-logged soil outside. If water is pumped out too soon, walls may be pushed in or floors pushed up.
- If the outside water level rises again after the day's pumping, start with a new water line.
- The soil may be very slow to drain, but do not hurry the pumping. Whatever is submerged in the flooded basement will not be damaged further. By delaying the pumping, serious structural damage may be prevented.

Cleaning Your Basement

- Shovel out the mud and debris while it is still moist.

- Hose down walls to remove as much silt as possible before it dries.

- Floors and walls may need sanitizing, particularly if sewage has entered the basement. (See Sections 13.1-13.10)

Check Structural Damage to Flooded Basement

- Buckled walls are evidenced by horizontal cracking and walls moving out of plumb. When buckling has seriously weakened the wall, rebuild the damaged parts immediately. While minor buckling will not have to be repaired, any noticeably buckled wall will eventually collapse from normal ground pressures and seasonal temperature changes.

- Settled walls and footings are indicated by vertical cracks either in small areas or throughout the structure. Contact a reliable contractor for this work.

- Heaved floors may need to be removed and rebuilt according to standard building practices.

- If a floor is badly cracked but has returned to its original level, and if there is sufficient headroom, you can place a new floor over the old one. Add a vapor barrier between the two floors. The new floor should be at least 2 inches thick.

- If a crawl space under your home is filled with mud, you should remove the mud as soon as possible to avoid rotting joists or foundation wood. Jack up the house, if necessary, to make sure all mud is removed.

Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service entitled "Louisiana Floods," and the Texas Cooperative Extension Service entitled "The Handbook for Emergency Preparation and Response"